

Could they accomplish it together?

ONE THING WE SELDOM NEED at Ottawa is what lawmakers in the United States call 'bipartisanship' - co-operation between the party currently in power and the 'opposition' party.

In Canada, and every other nation that has a parliamentary system of government, co-operation between the governing and opposition parties is seen only during national emergencies such as a world war or when no single party secures a majority of seats. But in the United States, the country's founders rejected the parliamentary system, as well as the British monarchy, in favour of a system of 'checks and balances' with power being shared among a president, Congress and a judiciary headed by a nine-member Supreme Court.

That was before the emergence of a two-party system, which today sees all three branches dominated by one party, with a Republican president, Congress and a Republican-dominated Supreme Court.

In such circumstances one might think the system would work smoothly, with the president having no difficulty having his wishes carried out and the resultant legislation having no problem winning judicial approval.

But that's hardly what we are witnessing in Washington, with the failure of attempts to get the Republican majority in the U.S. House of Representatives to agree on legislation that would replace the Affordable Care Act (ACA), former president Barack Obama's attempt to get something approaching the universal health care Canadians have enjoyed for nearly half a century. There's no doubt that President Donald Trump made repeal and replacement of the ACA, which Republicans dubbed Obamacare, his top priority, or that he worked hard to secure passage of the proposed replacement, the American Health Care Act, through Congress.

But thanks perhaps to his lack of prior involvement in political processes, Mr. Trump seemingly didn't comprehend the fact that the Republican party is a coalition of sorts, with some of its Congressional members far more conservative than others. And while they all agreed that the ACA should be repealed, they were utterly incapable of devising a replacement all could agree on.

In the circumstances, it's hardly surprising that the President has backed away from trying to blame the Democrats for not wanting to repeal their own legislation, and now sees the problem as the division within the governing Republicans.

And it will be interesting to see whether he picks up an idea advanced last weekend by a senior Senate Republican and the Republican governor of Ohio.

South Carolina Senator Lindsey Graham and Ohio Governor John Kasich both suggested bringing in the Democrats in a bid to come up with legislation that would appeal to moderates in both parties.

'I don't think that one party's going to be able to fix this by themselves,' Sen. Graham told a town hall event. 'I think the President should reach out to Democrats, I should reach out to Democrats, and we should say, 'Let's take a shot at doing this together, because it ain't working doing it by ourselves.'

On Sunday, Governor Kasich took a similar position during a CNN interview, saying President Trump should reach out to 'constructive' Democrats to put the pieces back together on a compromise fix to the ACA. Interestingly, he added that 'the fact is, I think his [Mr. Trump's] instincts would have been to cut a deal and to bring the Democrats in and get this thing done.'

It would be interesting to see the President appoint a bipartisan committee with a mandate to tour the country, visit spots like Canada and come up with recommendations on how the U.S. might finally have a universal health care system that was both sustainable and affordable to all residents.